

Kyrgyzstan: Profile of Media Ownership and Potential Foreign Influence Channels

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Introduction

What are the entry points for foreign actors to shape and influence the narrative in the Kyrgyz media market? This profile seeks to address some of the entry points related to media ownership and Russian state-owned media. AidData recognizes that malign influence may affect narrative creation in other ways, including through the republishing of foreign content in domestic media outlets, interactions on social media, and journalist biases. However, this project focuses solely on direct and indirect ownership of traditional domestic media outlets to identify potential entry points for Russian influence through elites and media owners. By better understanding the Kyrgyz Republic's domestic media ownership environment, including what media outlets citizens consume and who the owners of those outlets are, we can anticipate entry points where malign actors may try to influence domestic narratives.

The Kyrgyz Republic appears to have the most diverse set of media owners among Central Asian countries. However, the popularity of Kyrgyz and Russian state-owned outlets create many potential channels for Russian influence to directly or indirectly shape narratives consumed by Kyrgyz citizens. Since owners of top media houses have the potential to influence the content and tone of topics covered by journalists in their employ, understanding who owns the media is crucial to identifying avenues for influence and potential bias in reporting. In this profile, we begin to close this gap with an in-depth look at domestic media ownership in the Kyrgyz Republic.

This media ownership profile and the supporting data were prepared by AidData, a research lab at William & Mary's Global Research Institute.¹ The data for this profile was collected manually by AidData staff and student research assistants. We began by conducting web searches to identify a list of media in the Kyrgyz Republic, and then identified a list of the top-ranked outlets in terms of overall consumption. We then used this information to gather the ownership data. We used cross-country sources when available (e.g., Alexa²), as well as business registry data from the Kyrgyz Ministry

¹ This profile is part of a collaboration with the USAID E&E Bureau made possible through a buy-in to a Higher Education Solutions Network cooperative agreement (AID-A-12-00096) in place between USAID/LAB/HESN, AidData, and William & Mary.

² Alexa is an online analysis tool. AidData staff used Alexa's API to gauge website traffic. <https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo>.

of Justice, public opinion survey data, media watchdog sources, and other open source data.

In the following sections, we provide summary data on the presence of Russian state-owned media, top outlets, and media ownership in the Kyrgyz Republic as of 2021 (or the most contemporary data available). This profile focuses on the ownership of traditional broadcast, print, and online media outlets. Social media is not included in this analysis. By mapping out the ownership and influence of traditional forms of media, these profiles lend insights into potential channels for foreign influence in the top consumed outlets.

Russian Media Footprints

The most direct form of Kremlin influence in the Kyrgyz Republic's media landscape is via Russian state-owned media (see Table 1). All of the eleven Russian state-owned media outlets we tracked have a physical presence in the Kyrgyz Republic, which provides the Kremlin with a strong channel to directly communicate with, and ultimately influence, Kyrgyz citizens. Physical presence includes physical infrastructure, such as cable packages, physical office space or local bureaus, and radio broadcasters, but excludes satellite broadcasting and online or streaming availability. Table 1 provides a footprint of Russian state-owned media presence in the Kyrgyz Republic, but does not speak to how well-consumed each outlet is by Kyrgyz citizens.

Table 1: Russian state-owned media in the Kyrgyz Republic, 2021

Television		Print		Radio		News Agency	
Russia I	✓	Rossiyskaya Gazeta	✓	Sputnik	✓	TASS	✓
Russia 24	✓					Sputnik	✓
Russia K	✓						
RTR-Planeta	✓						
TV Centre	✓						
Channel One	✓						
RT	✓						

Other indirect forms of Russian influence are possible, including domestic outlets republishing narratives and pro-Russian journalists in-country. In this profile, AidData has captured direct Russian channels of influence through state-owned media infrastructure.

Top Media Outlets

Table 2 identifies the top five most-consumed media outlets in the Kyrgyz Republic by medium (e.g., television, print, radio, online) based on cross-sectional indicators such as viewership share and circulation. Television is the most consumed medium and is therefore likely more influential than other information sources.³ While we cannot know the exact influence of each individual outlet, we can assume that outlets that reach higher numbers of consumers have greater potential to influence more citizens. Russian state-owned media outlets are popular in the Kyrgyz Republic,⁴ and Russian state-owned Channel One is the most consumed television channel.

³ "Kyrgyzstan profile - Media." British Broadcasting Company. Published June 25, 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-16187183>.

⁴ "Kyrgyzstan profile - Media." British Broadcasting Company. Published June 25, 2019.

AidData used a weighted average of media consumption survey rankings from 2017 to present to determine the top media outlets in the Kyrgyz Republic. This strategy offers a more long-term perspective of top media outlets, rather than a snapshot of the top media outlets right now. As such, the top outlets may not exactly reflect the current order of most consumed outlets, but do show a reasonable picture of the media landscape over the past five years. Recent rankings are weighted more heavily to adjust for new changes.⁵ Additionally, this means that some outlets that recently have stopped circulation, such as Delo No, are included in our rankings.

Table 2: Top Kyrgyz media outlets ranked by overall consumption

Rank	Television	Print	Radio	Online
1	Russian Channel One	Super-info	Kyrgyzstan Obondoru	Akipress.org
2	OTRK	Vecherniy Bishkek	Europa Plus	Azattyk.kg
3	KTRK Music	Avtogid	Dream FM	24.kg
4	NTS	Delo No	Tumar FM	Kaktus.media
5	TV EITR	Slovo Kyrgyzstana	Sanjyra Radio	Turmush.kg

According to findings from an AidData survey of regional and local media experts in 2021, the majority of top Kyrgyz outlets mirror the results of open-source data collection by AidData researchers. However, additional outlets excluded from this top outlet list but ranked highly by local experts include the television channel April TV; the radio stations Hit FM Kyrgyzstan and Jash FM; and online outlets Sputnik.kg and Kloop.kg.

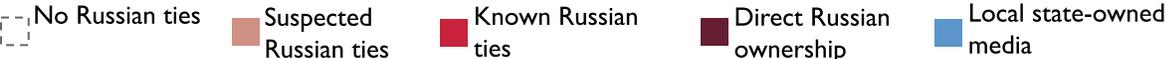
⁵ Television, Print and Radio: Television, radio and print rankings were calculated using multiple publicly available surveys and circulation data, including an AidData survey of country and regional experts conducted in summer 2021. Additional survey data came from: IREX's Media Sustainability Index (2018), M-Vector's "Media Research (8th Wave)" Report (2017), and CMDS' "Media Influence Matrix: Kyrgyzstan" (2019). For online outlets, Alexa (April 2021) was used in addition to the aforementioned surveys.

Media Ownership

Media ownership in the Kyrgyz Republic is fairly transparent due to the public business registry of the Ministry of Justice, though proxy owners sometimes conceal the true beneficiaries of media outlets. Further examples of ownership ties and relationships are discussed in the following section.

Table 3 lists the ownership information of top Kyrgyz media outlets by medium (e.g., television, newspaper, radio, online). The five Kyrgyz state-owned media outlets are color-coded blue. AidData staff categorized the remaining privately held media outlets based upon the level of Russian ownership that might increase their susceptibility to Kremlin influence. These categories are denoted with increasing saturation of red—no known Russian ties (no color), suspected Russian ties, known Russian ties, and direct Russian ownership. In the Kyrgyz Republic, three owners had suspected or known ties to the Russian government, and one outlet had direct Russian ownership.

Table 3: Ownership of top Kyrgyz media outlets by share



Medium	Rank	Outlet	Owner, Company	Owner, Individuals	Owner (%)
Television	1	Russian Channel One	Russian Government		100
	2	OTRK (ОТРК)	Government of the Kyrgyz Republic		100
	3	KTRK Music	Government of the Kyrgyz Republic		100
	4	NTS (НТС)	NTS TRK LLC	Omurbek Babanov	100
	5	TV EITR (ЭлТР)	Government of the Kyrgyz Republic		100
Print	1	Super-info	Super Media LLC	Ikramiddin Islamidinovich Nasirdinov	100
	2	Vecherniy Bishkek (Вечерний Бишкек)	CJSC Vecherniy Bishkek Publishing House	Alexander Kim	100
	3	Avtogid	Editorial office of the newspaper AVTOgid LLC	Vitaly Yen	100
	4	Delo No (Дело)	Social-legal Newspaper Delo No	Svetlana Krasilnikova Viktor Zapolsky	<i>Unknown</i> <i>Unknown</i>

	5 Slovo Kyrgyzstana (Слово Кыргызстана)	Government of the Kyrgyz Republic		100
Radio	1 Kyrgyzstan Obondoru (Кыргызстан обондору)	Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company (UMMC)	Igor Kudryashkin	60
			Andrey Kozitsyn	30
			Andrey Bokarev	10
	2 Europa Plus (Европа Плюс)	Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company (UMMC)	Igor Kudryashkin	60
			Andrey Kozitsyn	30
			Andrey Bokarev	10
	3 Dream FM (Мин Кьял)	Government of the Kyrgyz Republic		100
	4 Tumar FM (Тумар FM)	Tumar Media Group LLC	Alexey Valerievich Sidorov	100
	5 Sanjyra Radio (Санжыра радиосу)	NTS TRK LLC	Omurbek Babanov	100
	Online	1 Akipress.org	AKI Press Ltd	Marat Tazabekov
2 Azattyk.kg		United States Agency for Global Media		100
3 24.kg		Information Agency 24.kg LLC	Asel Ernestovna Otorbaeva	100
4 Kaktus.media		ProMedia Public Foundation	Dina Maslova	<i>Unknown</i>
			Narynbek Idinov	<i>Unknown</i>
5 Turmush.kg	AKI Press Ltd	Marat Tazabekov	100	

Results

Television

Television is the most consumed medium in the Kyrgyz Republic⁶ and has the least diverse ownership, with the government controlling three of the top five channels. The Kyrgyz government owns the second, third, and fifth most-consumed television outlets, OTRK, KTRK Music, and TV EITR, respectively. According to a 2020 Public Association of Journalists survey, OTRK in particular has recently assumed a prominent role as an

⁶ "Kyrgyzstan profile - Media." British Broadcasting Company. Published June 25, 2019.

outlet for state propaganda.⁷ The most-consumed television outlet in the Kyrgyz Republic is Russian Channel One, a Russian state-owned channel.⁸

The only privately owned top channel is NTS, the fourth most-consumed television outlet. While its ownership is highly opaque, most media report that NTS is owned by Omurbek Babanov, former Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic and a current opposition politician.⁹ In October 2017, Babanov ran as an independent presidential candidate, losing to President Sooronbay Jeenbekov, who promised to arrest Babanov on corruption charges.¹⁰ Babanov fled to Russia and in December 2017, under the new Jeenbekov administration, a lawsuit was filed against NTS, resulting in a raid and seizure of NTS offices.¹¹ Some articles were published stating that Babanov was no longer the owner of NTS in 2017,¹² but later articles stated that Babanov still controlled the outlet in 2019.¹³ In June 2021, following his return to the Kyrgyz Republic, Babanov was arrested on corruption charges under the current Sadyr Japarov administration.¹⁴ NTS has historically broadcast pro-opposition content, and Babanov has remained an opposition leader, likely leading to his arrest. The ownership of NTS is opaque and unclear following Babanov's recent arrest, though it is likely he still has control over the outlet.

⁷ Ashiraliev, E. "КЫРГЫЗ ЖУРНАЛИСТИКАСЫНЫН АЗЫРКЫ АБАЛЫ КАНДАЙ?" Public Association of Journalists. Published 2020.

<https://soros.kg/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Kyrgyz-zhurnalistikasynyn-abaly.pdf>.

⁸ Notably, Russian Channel One, a Russian state-owned channel, is the most-consumed outlet, not Public Channel One, a popular Kyrgyz state-owned television channel.

⁹ "Mirzhan Balybaev has been appointed as the Director General of the NTS TV channel." Azattyk. Published March 18, 2019. <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/29827945.html>.

¹⁰ "Kyrgyz Prosecutors Open Criminal Case Against Presidential Runner-Up." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Published November 4, 2017.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyz-prosecutors-open-criminal-case-against-babanov/28835060.html>.

¹¹ "Kyrgyz Officials Impound TV Station Property Owned By Opposition Politician Babanov." Azattyk. Published December 19, 2017.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-nts-tv-opposition-babnov-officials-impound-property/28927074.html>.

¹² "NTS no longer belongs to Omurbek Babanov." 24.kg News Agency. Published December 22, 2017.

https://24.kg/english/71836_NTS_no_longer_belongs_to_Omurbek_Babanov/

¹³ "Babanov's return. Security officers check fact of raider seizure of NTS." 24.kg News Agency. Published April 12, 2019.

https://24.kg/english/114732_Babanovs_return_Security_officers_check_fact_of_raider_seizure_of_NTS/

¹⁴ "Kyrgyz Ex-PM Babanov Released From Custody For Medical Treatment Abroad." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Published July 27, 2021.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-babanov-released-treatment/31379820.html>.

In sum, the television industry has a number of vulnerabilities to Kremlin influence. The Russian government controls the most-watched television channel in the Kyrgyz Republic. Three outlets are controlled by the Kyrgyz government, with OTRK in particular recently broadcasting messages with pro-Japarov propaganda. In the case of the privately owned NTS, the Kyrgyz government has employed significant restrictive practices to limit the channel's independence. With heavy state control and influence in the television sector, as well as the popularity of Russian state-owned television, the Kremlin has a number of channels to influence Kyrgyz citizens.

Print

Ownership of print outlets in the Kyrgyz Republic is more diverse than that of television, but even in this medium, the influence of the government and political elites is still evident. Along these lines, the fifth most-consumed print outlet is Slovo Kyrgyzstana, a Kyrgyz state-owned, Russian-language newspaper. The remaining top print outlets are privately owned, though the print sector in the Kyrgyz Republic is struggling to stay afloat with the rise of online outlets.¹⁵

Super-info is the most-consumed print outlet. Until May 2019, Super-info was owned by the family of Kilychbek Sultan, the former Kyrgyz Ambassador to South Korea and founder of Super-info. The previous Jeenbekov administration filed a number of lawsuits against Sultan and Super-info in 2018, similar to its treatment of NTS. Following state pressure, Sultan sold Super-info in May 2019. Although Sultan publicly stated the sale was to a family member,¹⁶ Ikramiddin Islamidinovich Nasirdinov, the new owner according to the public Ministry of Justice business registry, was in fact unrelated.¹⁷ Following the sale, some sources suggested that Raimbek Matraimov, a Kyrgyz oligarch and former Deputy Chief of the Customs Service, purchased Super-info

¹⁵ Turdubaeva, Elina. "Media landscape in Kyrgyzstan: Caught between elite capture and control of political and business interests." The Foreign Policy Centre. Published March 1, 2021. <https://fpc.org.uk/media-landscape-in-kyrgyzstan-caught-between-elite-capture-and-control-of-political-and-business-interests/>.

¹⁶ "Popular Kyrgyz-language Super Info media outlet has new owner." 24.kg News Agency. Published May 24, 2019. https://24.kg/english/118585_Popular_Kyrgyz-language_Super_Info_media_outlet_has_new_owner/.

¹⁷ "Who are the New Owners of Super Info?" Factcheck.kg. Published May 24, 2019. <https://factcheck.kg/kto-oni-novye-vladelczy-super-info/>.

from Sultan and controls the popular outlet through Nasirdinov.¹⁸ However, in October 2020, incumbent President Sadyr Japarov placed Raimbek Matraimov under house arrest for corruption.¹⁹ While Matraimov was released in April 2021,²⁰ his arrest made the ownership of Super-info opaque, as it was unclear who controlled the outlet during his sentence. Nasirdinov is the legal stated owner; however, the true beneficiary is unclear, as a Sultan family member, Raimbek Matraimov, or an unknown third party may control the popular outlet.

The second most-consumed print outlet is Vecherniy Bishkek, a Russian-language daily newspaper. Founded and currently owned by Alexander Kim, Vecherniy Bishkek went through a tumultuous ownership period, as former co-owner Alexander Ryabushkin used his state influence to stage a raid of the outlet's offices in 2015.²¹ Ryabushkin was the sole owner of Vecherniy Bishkek until 2019, when a court ruled in favor of returning the newspaper back to Alexander Kim's control.²² These shifts in media ownership correspond with political turnover at the time, as former President Atambayev forced Kim to cede ownership to Ryabushkin, until President Jeenbekov took power and undid the work of his predecessor.²³

The third most-consumed print outlet is Avtogid, a newspaper for selling or buying cars. Businessman and lawyer Vitaly Yen is the owner of Avtogid. Yen has been involved

¹⁸ "Popular Kyrgyz-language Super Info media outlet has new owner." 24.kg News Agency. Published May 24, 2019.

¹⁹ "House Arrest Ordered For Kyrgyzstan's Powerful Oligarch Raimbek Matraimov." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Published October 20, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-detains-former-customs-chief-matraimov-on-corruption-charges/30902497.html>.

²⁰ RFE/RL's Kyrgyzstan Service, OCCRP, Kloop, and Bellingcat. "The 'Beautiful' Life Of A Kyrgyz Customs Official." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Published December 14, 2020. <https://www.rferl.org/a/matraimov-dubai-kyrgyzstan-corruption-luxury-lifestyle/30996456.html>; "Kyrgyz Powerbroker Matraimov Released From Custody, Case Closed." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Published April 15, 2021. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-matraimov-released-probe-closed/31204913.html>.

²¹ "Kyrgyzstan: As political winds change, iconic newspaper again tussled over." Eurasianet. Published October 31, 2018. <https://eurasianet.org/kyrgyzstan-as-political-winds-change-iconic-newspaper-again-tussled-over>.

²² "All Vecherniy Bishkek's assets returned to Alexander Kim." 24.kg News Agency. Published August 1, 2019. https://24.kg/english/125022_All_Vecherniy_Bishkeks_assets_returned_to_Alexander_Kim/.

²³ "Kyrgyzstan: As political winds change, iconic newspaper again tussled over." Eurasianet. Published October 31, 2018.

in international franchise and foreign direct investment work in the Kyrgyz Republic and has spoken at business events run by the United States Embassy in Bishkek.²⁴

The fourth most-consumed print outlet was Delo No, until the outlet shut down its printing operations on May 26, 2021. The owners and founders of Delo No prior to the shutdown were Svetlana Krasilnikova and Viktor Zapolsky.²⁵ AidData notes that the inclusion of closed outlets in our rankings highlights trends of influential outlets, as owners of many closed outlets across the Europe and Eurasia region often continue to exert influence even after the outlet has closed. Additionally, all measured rankings of top print outlets in the Kyrgyz Republic included Delo No among the most-read outlets.

In sum, while top print outlets have more diverse ownership than top television channels, the Kyrgyz government still exerts considerable influence over the print sector. Not only does the government directly own one of the top print outlets, but it has imposed ownership changes on other top outlets such as Super-info and Vecherniy Bishkek, likely to elevate voices more sympathetic to the incumbent regime. This creates major potential vulnerabilities to Russian influence, as the government has the power and willingness to remove owners and influence privately owned newspapers based on the best interests of the incumbent administration.

Radio

Radio consumption is declining in the Kyrgyz Republic, due to the rise of internet outlets and popularity of television channels.²⁶ Like print and television, most top radio stations are controlled by the Kyrgyz government or Kyrgyz or Russian political elites. The Kyrgyz government directly owns the third most-consumed radio station, Dream FM.

²⁴ "International Franchise and Trade Expo Turns the Spotlight on Bishkek for U.S. and International Investors." U.S. Embassy in the Kyrgyz Republic. Published October 11, 2019. <https://kg.usembassy.gov/international-franchise-and-trade-expo-turns-the-spotlight-on-bishkek-for-u-s-and-international-investors/>.

²⁵ "'Delo No. ...' newspaper announces its closure." 24.kg News Agency. Published May 26, 2021. https://24.kg/english/195195_Delo_No_newspaper_announces_its_closure/.

²⁶ Toralieva, Gulnura. "Media Influence Matrix: Kyrgyzstan." CEU Center for Media, Data and Society (CMDS). Published July 2019.

Both top radio stations—Kyrgyzstan Obondoru and Europa Plus, respectively—are owned by the Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company (UMMC) through Europe Media Group. UMMC is majority owned by Russian oligarch Igor Kudryashkin, with minority shares owned by Chief Executive Officer of UMMC Andrey Kozitsyn and Russian oligarch Andrey Bokarev.

Tumar FM, the fourth most-consumed radio station, is owned by Alexey Sidorov, its founder. A young Russian national, Sidorov purchased the frequency for Tumar FM from Pyramid Media Group immediately prior to the Kyrgyz government seizure of Pyramid in 2010.²⁷ Tumar FM has gained in popularity as a hit music station.

The fifth most-consumed radio station is Sanjyra Radio, owned by NTS TRK. Sanjyra, like NTS, is owned by former Prime Minister and opposition candidate Omurbek Babanov. In Fall 2017, the Kyrgyz government revoked Sanjyra's license as a result of repercussions against Babanov. However, Sanjyra purchased a new frequency in March 2018, leading to its rebroadcast.²⁸

Top radio outlets are vulnerable to Kremlin influence as well. The top two stations are controlled by Russian oligarchs with connections to the Russian government. The Kyrgyz government directly controls Dream FM and has exerted significant influence over Pyramid and Sanjyra. The fact that the Kyrgyz government is willing to curb independent media in favor of political interests creates an opportunity for the Kremlin to exert influence via these channels.

Online

Online media outlets are relatively independent from Kyrgyz government interference in their operations and enjoy the most diverse ownership as compared to other mediums in the country. No top online outlets are owned by the Kyrgyz government;

²⁷ "Alexei Sidorov, Director of Radio 'Tumar': 'My First Radio Broadcasted when I was a Child.'" Super-info. Published February 10, 2011.

<https://www.super.kg/article/?article=6047>.

²⁸ "Radio Sanjyra has bought a frequency and is preparing to re-broadcast." 24.kg News Agency. Published March 23, 2018.

https://24.kg/kyrgyzcha/79270_sanjyra_radiosu_jyishtyik_satyip_alyp_kayra_efirge_chyiguuga_dayardan_uuda/.

however, the United States government owns the second most-consumed online outlet, Azattyk.kg, the Kyrgyz branch of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Marat Tazabekov is the Chief Executive Officer, founder, and owner of AKI Press Ltd, the parent company of both the first and fifth most-consumed online outlets, Akipress.org and Turmush.kg, respectively. According to IREX's Media Sustainability Index report, AKI Press is loyal to the authorities and receives news and press releases earlier than other media outlets.²⁹ As a result, while AKI Press is privately owned, Tazabekov is loyal to the Kyrgyz government and uses AKI Press as a reporting platform, rather than for investigative journalism.

The third most-consumed online outlet is 24.kg. Officially owned by Director-General Asel Ortobaeva, some articles assert that Dzhanybek Bakchiev owns or influences 24.kg. Bakchiev, a former Member of Parliament for the Bir Bol Party, denies these claims, as does Ortobaeva.³⁰ The outlet appears to be entirely funded by advertising revenues and maintains a stable financial position, unlike most news outlets in the Kyrgyz Republic.³¹ As a result, while Bakchiev may potentially influence the content of 24.kg, the news outlet is largely financially independent of the incumbent Japarov government, which may provide greater protection from political interference.

The fourth most-consumed online outlet is Kaktus.media. During the Atambayev administration, a number of state-backed lawsuits ordered Zanoza.kg, an independent investigative online outlet, to cease operation for libel.³² Dina Maslova and Narynbek Idinov, the founders of Zanoza, created Kaktus.media, another investigative outlet, which quickly gained popularity.³³

²⁹ "Kyrgyzstan 2018: Media Sustainability Index." International Research and Exchanges Board. Published 2018.

³⁰ Dzumakadyrov, Sadat. "Has the government taken over the 24.kg news agency?" Azattyk.org. Published September 21, 2015.

<https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27259613.html>

³¹ Toralieva, Gulnura. "Media Influence Matrix: Kyrgyzstan." CEU Center for Media, Data and Society (CMDS). Published July 2019.

³² Imanaliyeva, Ayzirek. "New Kyrgyzstan leader vilifying free press." Eurasianet. Published November 10, 2020.

<https://eurasianet.org/new-kyrgyzstan-leader-vilifying-free-press>

³³ "Zanoza.kg turns into Kaktus." 24.kg News Agency. Published August 1, 2017.

https://24.kg/english/58978_Zanozakg_turns_into_Kaktus/.

Online outlets have significantly less Kyrgyz government influence in their ownership structures than other mediums. Azattyk.kg, 24.kg, and Kaktus.media all have revealed government corruption and acted as independent free media. However, the shutdown of Zanoza.kg does show that the government can use libel lawsuits to influence popular media outlets in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Conclusion

In this brief, we have presented an overview of the domestic media ownership environment of the Kyrgyz Republic. The collected data highlight two trends in Kyrgyz media ownership. First, despite more diverse ownership than the other Central Asian countries, the Kyrgyz government exerts considerable influence in the country's media space. Second, Kyrgyz media outlets are highly vulnerable to Russian influence.

The Kyrgyz government directly owns five of the country's top media outlets, and privately held outlets loyal to the government, such as Turmush.kg and AKI Press, are also present amongst top media. Additionally, the Kyrgyz government and political elites across multiple administrations have consistently used libel laws and lawsuits to curtail the operations and content of independent media. The shutdown of Zadoza, restrictions imposed on Super-info and Vecherniy Bishkek, and arrests of political elites like Omurbek Babanov and Raimbek Matraimov illustrate that the Kyrgyz government is both willing and able to exert influence over privately held media outlets.

These dynamics create an opening for external actors such as the Kremlin to co-opt and exert influence over Kyrgyz news outlets via cultivating closer ties with the government. In addition, the Kremlin can more directly influence the country's media space via its Russian state-owned media and ownership stakes in Kyrgyz media outlets. All eleven measured Russian state-owned media outlets are present in the Kyrgyz Republic, and Channel One is the most-consumed television channel. Russian oligarchs own both Kyrgyzstan Obondoru and Europa Plus, the top radio stations.

In sum, the Russian government has a number of potential channels to directly communicate with the Kyrgyz public via its own state-owned media, as well as

indirectly influence citizens via ownership stakes in privately held media outlets and efforts to co-opt Kyrgyz state-owned outlets.